

Annex H: 'Prescribable' and 'street' benzodiazepines

- H1. In 2019, when preparing statistics for the Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report, the Information Services Division (ISD) of NHS National Services Scotland, which is now part of Public Health Scotland (PHS), proposed a distinction between 'prescribable' and 'street' benzodiazepines. The two categories are defined as follows:
- 'Prescribable benzodiazepines' are benzodiazepines (or metabolites thereof) which are licensed for prescription in the UK and widely prescribed in Scotland (but which may not actually have been prescribed to the person who died after taking them); and
 - 'Street benzodiazepines' are benzodiazepines (or metabolites thereof) which are:
 - a) not licensed for prescription in the UK; or
 - b) thought to have originated from an illicit source (due to their having very low overall levels of prescribing in Scotland).
- H2. In this publication, the distinction between 'prescribable' and 'street' benzodiazepines is as specified annually by PHS, taking into account expert advice from pharmacists and toxicologists. National Records of Scotland (NRS) and PHS have agreed that, for the purposes of NRS's statistics of drug-related deaths, NRS will count each benzodiazepine on the basis of how PHS would categorise it for the purpose of statistics for the latest year. So a drug's categorisation could change: it might be counted as 'street' in the figures that NRS produces in one year, and as 'prescribable' in another year. To avoid confusion, specific drugs will not be counted in one category up to a certain date, and in another category thereafter. Any substances which have been recategorised will be identified in future editions of this publication, and users of the statistics will be able to see the effect of any such recategorisations by comparing the original figures for the earlier years and the revised figures for those years that are published later.
- H3. PHS was happy to classify most benzodiazepines as 'prescribable' or 'street' on the basis of information from its Prescribing Information System database. However, lorazepam was an exception. It is both a prescription drug and a metabolite of diclazepam (that is, lorazepam may be produced by the body metabolising diclazepam). Delorazepam and lormetazepam are also metabolites of diclazepam. Therefore, NRS was advised that:
- if none of diclazepam, delorazepam or lormetazepam was present in the body, NRS should assume that the lorazepam had been taken as a drug in its own right (or had been administered as an emergency treatment for an MDMA overdose) - so it should be counted as 'prescribable'; and
 - if one or more of diclazepam, delorazepam and lormetazepam was also present in the body, NRS should assume that the lorazepam had been produced by the body metabolising diclazepam (rather than being taken as a drug in its own right) - so it should be counted as 'street'.
- H4. The following points should be noted about the lists which appear below:
- they cover only the benzodiazepines (and metabolites thereof) which were reported as being present in the body for deaths which were registered in Scotland up to the end of the latest year for which figures appear in this publication;
 - the lists do not include brand names (such as valium), as pathologists should use generic names (such as diazepam) when reporting which substances were found in the body;
 - a few of the substances which are listed under 'street' benzodiazepines (for example, alprazolam) are available on private prescription (or to relatively few people on NHS prescription) – PHS has counted such substances as 'street' benzodiazepines

because it seems likely that the people who died after taking them would have obtained them illicitly;

- if pathologists report that benzodiazepines were present (without giving the names of any specific substances, such as diazepam or etizolam), NRS assumes that 'prescribable' benzodiazepines were present;

H5. 'Prescribable' benzodiazepines (and metabolites): as classified by PHS in June 2021

Chlordiazepoxide
Clobazam
Clonazepam
Desmethyldiazepam
Diazepam
Loprazolam
Midazolam
Nitrazepam
Nordiazepam
Oxazepam
Temazepam
7-aminoclonazepam
7-aminonitrazepam

H6. 'Street' benzodiazepines (and metabolites): as classified by PHS in June 2021

Adinazolam
Alprazolam
Bromazepam
Clonazolam
Cloxazolam
Delorazepam
Diclazepam
Etizolam
Flualprazolam
Flubromazepam
Flubromazolam
Flunitrazepam
Lormetazepam
Phenazepam
Pyrazolam
8 aminoclonazolam

H7. Benzodiazepine (or metabolite) which has not been classified

Lorazepam – see paragraph H3. This does not appear in either of the above lists because it is counted as 'prescribable' if it is assumed to have been taken (or administered) as a drug in its own right, and as 'street' if it is assumed to have been produced by the body metabolising diclazepam.